

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of processing electronic promissory payments made by a customer to a merchant, the method comprising:

receiving an electronic representation of a promissory payment that includes an identification of the customer account and the merchant;

determining whether the payment can be submitted for subscriber settlement by evaluating a special rules database to determine whether the customer's transactions are subject to a special rule;

submitting the payment to the customer's financial institution electronically if it is determined that the customer's electronic representation is not subject to a special rule; and

submitting the payment to the customer's financial institution according to the special rule if it is determined that the customer's electronic representation is subject to a special rule.

2. The method of Claim 1, wherein evaluating the special rules database includes identifying the customer's financial institution associated with at least one of an account number, a routing number, and an alternative routing number.

3. The method of Claim 1, wherein evaluating the special rules database includes determining if the special rule comprises printing the electronic representation of the payment as a paper drafted check for submission to the clearing house.

4. The method of Claim 3, wherein submitting the payment to the customer's financial institution includes submitting the paper drafted check to the customer's financial institution.

5. The method of Claim 3, wherein submitting the payment to the customer's financial institution includes submitting a pre-authorized check or PAC item.

6. The method of Claim 1, wherein evaluating the special rules database includes determining if the special rule comprises submitting the electronic representation of the payment to the customer's financial institution via a direct electronic access system.

7. The method of Claim 6, wherein submitting the payment to the customer's financial institution includes submitting the electronic representation of the payment to the customer's financial institution via the direct electronic access system.

8. The method of Claim 1, wherein evaluating the special rules database includes determining if the special rule comprises the use of an alternative routing transit number.

9. The method of Claim 8, wherein submitting the payment includes submitting the payment to the customer's financial institution using the alternative routing transit number.

10. The method of Claim 1, wherein evaluating the special rules database includes determining if the special rule comprises the use of an alternative account number.

11. The method of Claim 10, wherein submitting the payment includes submitting the payment to the customer's financial institution using the alternative account number.

12. The method of Claim 1, wherein receiving electronic promissory payments comprises generating an electronic profile relating to the customer using electronic check conversion.

13. The method of Claim 1, wherein submitting the customer's electronic representation to the customer's financial institution comprises transferring funds from the customer's account using electronic fund transfer.

14. The method of Claim 1, wherein submitting the customer's electronic representation to the customer's financial institution directly comprises transferring funds from the customer's account direct connect, On-Us processing.

15. The method of Claim 1, wherein the method further comprises performing a risk assessment relating to processing electronic promissory payments using the electronic representations of the promissory payments.

16. The method of Claim 1, wherein the method further comprises updating the special rules database in a manner so as to record previous submissions by the customer.

17. A method of settling a financial transaction between a customer and a merchant using a routing mechanism, the method comprising:

acquiring an electronic profile relating to the customer, wherein the electronic profile can be used to transfer funds from the customer's financial institution;

evaluating the electronic profile using a special rules database having previously stored electronic information relating to the customer in a manner so as to identify a special rule; and

requesting settlement of the financial transaction with the customer's financial institution using at least one of the electronic profile and the special rule, wherein the special rule identifies the manner in which the funds can be transferred from the customer's financial institution.

18. The method of Claim 17, wherein identifying the special rule includes identifying that the financial transaction requires printing of a paper drafted check.

19. The method of Claim 18, wherein printing the paper drafted check includes printing a drop-to-draft check.

20. The method of Claim 19, wherein requesting settlement of the financial transaction comprises submitting the printed paper drafted check to the clearing house to settle the financial transaction.

21. The method of Claim 17, wherein identifying the special rule includes identifying that the financial transaction requires the use of a direct electronic access system.

22. The method of Claim 21, wherein requesting settlement of the financial transaction comprises submitting the electronic profile to the customer's financial institution using the direct electronic access system.

23. The method of Claim 17, wherein evaluating the special rules database includes evaluating pre-recorded electronic information relating to either the customer or the customer's financial institution.

24. The method of Claim 23, wherein evaluating the pre-recorded information comprises evaluating a previous check writing history relating to either the customer or the customer's financial institution.

25. The method of Claim 17, wherein identifying the special rule comprises identifying either the customer or the customer's financial institution associated with at least one of an account number, a routing number, and an alternative routing number.

26. The method of Claim 17, wherein the method further comprises generating a risk score indicative of the risk associated with the financial transaction.

27. The method of Claim 17, wherein the method further comprises updating the special rules database in a manner so as to record previous electronic profiles relating the customer.

28. The method of Claim 17, wherein evaluating the electronic profile further comprises developing at least one special rule relating to at least the customer.

29. A system for resolving an electronic check transaction to transfer money from a customer's financial institution via an existing funds transfer entity in response to the customer providing a promissory payment to a merchant, the system comprising:

a transaction device which receives a promissory payment from the customer to the merchant, wherein the transaction device generates and transmits an electronic profile indicative of the promissory payment and routing information; and

a check approval service that has access to records of past electronic check transactions that receives the electronic profile, wherein the check approval service identifies an electronic route for obtaining access to the customer's account and either (i) submits the electronic profile to the existing funds transfer entity electronically for electronic transfer of the funds from the customer's account, or (ii) initiates an alternative resolution strategy prior to submitting the electronic profile to the existing funds transfer entity electronically if the records of past electronic check transactions indicates that an electronic check transaction for the received electronic profile may not be successful.

30. The system of Claim 29, wherein the check approval service submits the electronic profile to the existing funds transfer entity electronically by submitting the electronic profile to an electronic check conversion entity of a federal banking clearing house.

31. The system of Claim 29, wherein the check approval service includes a special rules data base that contains identifiers identifying electronic profiles for which electronic check transaction may not be successful.

32. The system of Claim 31, wherein the special rules data structure includes indicators of alternative resolution strategies that will result in successful transfer of funds from the customer's account in response to the check approval service receiving the electronic profile.

33. The system of Claim 32, wherein the alternative resolution strategies include:  
printing a paper representation of the electronic profile and submitting the paper representation to an existing paper clearing house so as to initiate the transfer of money from the customer's financial institution;  
changing the routing information of the electronic profile so as to identify a new route for obtaining access to the customer's account and submitting the changed electronic profile to the existing funds transfer entity electronically; and  
submitting the electronic profile to the customer's financial institution via an alternative funds transfer entity.

34. The system of Claim 33, the check approval service changes the routing information to identify a new financial institution associated with the customer's financial institution that will receive and process the electronic profile.

35. The system of Claim 33, wherein the check approval service submits the electronic profile via an alternative funds transfer entity by submitting the electronic profile directly to the customer's financial institution bypassing the existing funds transfer entity.

36. The system of Claim 29, wherein the check approval service includes an administrative component that when an electronic profile is submitted to the existing funds transfer entity electronically and the submission does not result in the transfer of funds from the customer's account, and wherein the administrative component attempts to develop an alternative resolution strategy that will result in subsequent transfer of funds for similar transactions.

37. The system of Claim 36, wherein the administrative component tracks the customer, if the records of past electronic check transactions indicates that an electronic check transaction for the received electronic profile may not be successful, by storing the customer's electronic profile in a customer list so as to develop the alternative resolution strategy for future financial transactions involving the customer.

38. The system of Claim 36, wherein the administrative component develops the alternative resolution strategy by contacting financial institutions associated with the customer's account so as to identify alternate routing mechanisms for transferring funds from the customer's account.

39. The system of Claim 36, wherein developing the alternative resolution strategy includes reviewing the electronic profile for mistakes, reviewing the electronic profile for pattern matching, reviewing an image of the electronic profile, settlement via On-Us transaction, contacting the customer, and contacting the merchant, contacting the financial institution.

40. The system of Claim 36, wherein the alternate routing strategy includes the use of at least one of an alternate account routing number, an alternate routing number, a paper clearing house routing system, a direct electronic access routing system for transferring funds from the customer's account.

41. The system of Claim 36, wherein the administration component records the developed alternative resolution strategy in a retrievable manner so that the developed alternative resolution strategy can be used in future transactions involving the customer.

42. The system of Claim 36, wherein the administration component re-submits the electronic profile using the developed alternative resolution strategy to determine if similar transactions involving the customer will result in subsequent transfer of funds.

43. A method for resolving an electronic check transaction to transfer money from a customer's financial institution via an existing funds transfer entity in response to the customer providing a promissory payment, the method comprising:

- receiving a promissory payment from the customer;
- generating an electronic profile indicative of the promissory payment;
- transmitting the electronic profile;
- accessing records of past electronic check transactions;
- identifying routing information for obtaining access to the customer's account;
- submitting the electronic profile to the existing funds transfer entity electronically for electronic transfer of funds from the customer's financial institution if it is determined that the records of past electronic check transactions indicates that an electronic check transaction for the received electronic profile will be successful;
- and
- initiating an alternative resolution strategy prior to submitting the electronic profile to the existing funds transfer entity electronically if it is determined that the

records of past electronic check transactions indicates that an electronic check transaction for the received electronic profile may not be successful.

44. The method of Claim 43, wherein submitting the electronic profile to the existing funds transfer entity electronically includes submitting the electronic profile to an electronic check conversion entity of a federal banking clearing house.

45. The method of Claim 43, wherein the method further comprises identifying electronic profiles for which electronic check transaction may not be successful.

46. The method of Claim 45, wherein identifying electronic profiles includes identifying alternative resolution strategies that will result in successful transfer of funds from the customer's account in response to receiving the electronic profile.

47. The method of Claim 46, wherein identifying alternative resolution strategies include at least one of:

- printing a paper representation of the electronic profile and submitting the paper representation to an existing paper clearing house so as to initiate the transfer of money from the customer's account;

- changing the account information of the electronic profile so as to identify a new account number for obtaining access to the customer's account and submitting the changed electronic profile to the existing funds transfer entity electronically;

- changing the routing information of the electronic profile so as to identify a new route for obtaining access to the customer's account and submitting the changed electronic profile to the existing funds transfer entity electronically; and

- submitting the electronic profile to the customer's financial institution via an alternative funds transfer entity.

48. The method of Claim 47, the method further comprises changing the routing information to identify a new financial institution branch associated with the customer's financial institution that will receive and process the electronic profile.

49. The method of Claim 47, wherein submitting the electronic profile via an alternative funds transfer entity includes submitting the electronic profile directly to the customer's financial institution bypassing the existing funds transfer entity.

50. The method of Claim 43, wherein the method further comprises developing an alternative resolution strategy that will result in subsequent transfer of funds for similar transactions if submitting the electronic profile to the existing funds transfer entity does not result in the transfer of funds from the customer's account.

51. The method of Claim 50, wherein the method further comprises tracking the customer's transactions, if the records of past electronic check transactions indicates that an electronic check transaction for the received electronic profile may not be successful, by storing the customer's electronic profile in a customer list so as to develop the alternative resolution strategy for future financial transactions involving the customer.

52. The method of Claim 50, wherein developing the alternative resolution strategy includes contacting financial institutions associated with the customer's account so as to identify alternate routing mechanisms for transferring funds from the customer's account.

53. The method of Claim 52, wherein identifying alternate routing mechanisms includes identifying at least one of an alternate account routing number, an alternate branch routing number, a paper clearing house routing system, and a direct electronic access routing system.

54. The method of Claim 50, wherein the method further comprises recording the developed alternative resolution strategy in a retrievable manner so that the developed alternative resolution strategy can be used in future transactions involving the customer.

55. The method of Claim 50, wherein the method further comprises re-submitting the electronic profile using the developed alternative resolution strategy to determine if similar transactions involving the customer will result in subsequent transfer of funds.